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Editorial

Robin Skeates

The General Editor

Durham University, UK

In this wide-ranging third issue of the *European Journal of Archaeology* for 2012 you will discover six general articles and twelve reviews of major books of significance to European archaeology. I would like to thank the dedicated *EJA* editorial team for helping to publish these contributions, which I summarize and comment on below.

Liv Helga Dommasnes and Sandra Montón-Subías, the co-chairs of AGE (Archaeology and Gender in Europe), provide an historical overview of the development of gender archaeologies across Europe. In particular, they compare developments in Scandinavia, Britain, the German-speaking area and Southern Europe between the early 1970s and today, taking into account different academic, national and linguistic traditions. This is an important article because it attempts to overcome the Anglo-American bias evident in previous accounts of the history of gender in archaeology and because it has the potential to serve as a platform for developing more critical histories of European gender archaeology in the future.

Mark White and Paul Pettitt rigorously question the context of deposition and discovery (in 1927) of a human maxilla in Kent's Cavern in England, and vigorously reject its recent reinterpretation in *Nature* as the earliest fossil evidence for modern human presence in Northern Europe – prior to the appearance of the Aurignacian in this region. Their critique is based on a painstaking study of unpublished archival records and published reports and on a detailed knowledge of the cave's stratigraphy. As this study makes clear, we cannot underestimate the complexities of this site – however famous and much-investigated it may be.

Gwenaëlle Goude, Francesca Castorina, Estelle Herrscher, Sandrine Cabut and Mary Anne Tafuri present the results of their pioneering strontium isotope analyses of human teeth and bones from five Middle Neolithic sites in South-West France, and discuss these in terms of human diet and mobility. They hypothesize that herder mobility could have been common in the Garonne area compared to the more sedentary lives of farmers in Languedoc. They also highlight the possibility of female mobility in a few cases. At this early stage, the results and conclusions are tentative, but they could serve as important building blocks in constructing biochemical evidence of residence, gender-specific mobility and even cultural groupings in the West Mediterranean Neolithic.

Catherine Frieman contributes to current debate about the 'dagger idea' in Neolithic Europe, first by questioning the common assertion that fishtail-handled flint daggers made in Late Neolithic southern Scandinavian were explicit imitations of contemporary metal-hilted daggers, then by proposing that daggers, in any material, should be conceived of as 'boundary objects' which shared a common technological heritage and bridged socio-cultural boundaries by signalling shared participation in widespread systems of communication and

exchange. Whether or not one agrees with the details of the typological, technological and social arguments presented, this study does successfully replace the old idea of a unilinear development from flint to bronze daggers in Europe with a far richer and more interesting biographical account of this important category of artefact.

Johan Ling's starting point is that traditional interpretations of the numerous ship depictions in the Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age rock art of the Bohuslän province on the west coast of Sweden have mainly focussed on their mythological aspects at the expense of their social dimensions. He then argues that the largest and most-crewed ship images could represent real war canoes (broadly comparable to the excavated Hjortspring boat and to ethnographic examples), used for special maritime events, and that the practice of producing these images at coastal sites may have served to reinforce a martial, maritime ideology. Ling's argument, which is based on a detailed, first-hand knowledge of the rock art, will hopefully now stimulate further discussion of the reasons why people depicted these boats.

Gabor Thomas's study focuses on twenty-eight old and new finds of belt and strap fittings, which were originally imported from the Frankish continent to England in the Viking period. He uses these objects to challenge the notion of an 'Anglo-Scandinavian' identity in Viking-age England, and to present a more nuanced and hybridized picture in which the adoption and adaptation of Carolingian identity also formed an integral part of cultural dynamics in England and the wider North Sea world. This excellent article highlights the potential of problem-oriented and theoretically-informed artefact studies to bring relatively obscure and poorly contextualized collections of objects to life within a wider cultural and political context.

The following reviews section offers assessments of a variety of recently published books. It begins with three edited thematic volumes: the first debating ‘the death of archaeological theory’, the second on maritime archaeology (which also features in a special section of *EJA* 15.2), and the third on the archaeological study of molluscs. The other books are ordered chronologically, extending from the Neolithic and Copper Age of Eurasia, to the bronze artefacts and rock art of the Bronze Age, to two important new books about social dynamics in first millennium Europe, books on the ancient sites of Pompeii and Caulonia, and an agenda-setting volume on Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

Building upon our growing success in publishing articles rapidly, and in attracting larger numbers of contributors and readers, the *EJA* will be published quarterly from 2013, beginning with a February issue. If you are interested in publishing an article on any aspect of European archaeology, do get in touch with a member of our editorial team or visit us on <http://www.maney.co.uk/index.php/journals/eja/>.